

THE SAN DIEGO UNION  
Wednesday, July 20, 1983

# Productivity group producing

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You've no doubt read about groups that appoint a committee and 39 subcommittees to study how to streamline their committee system. Or groups that decide they must hold down the length of their meetings — then meet for 14 straight hours debating how to do it.

Cynics expected pretty much the same when President Reagan last year set up a White House Conference on Productivity. What could be more counter-productive than a bunch of scholars sitting around discussing productivity? Indeed, the polysyllabic word "productivity" is itself anti-productive.

L. William Seidman, co-chairman of the President's productivity conference, yesterday confessed that marathon meetings of pipe-puffing professors seldom enhance anyone's productivity — but this conference is making lots of headway.

It's not taking credit for the big turnaround in productivity now taking place in the economy — that always occurs as the nation pulls out of a recession. However, there is little doubt that this commission has done a good job educating the general public to the need to improve productivity.

Today and tomorrow, the conference is huddling at the University of San Diego to talk about two key parts of the puzzle: What government can do about productivity — and the government's own low productivity.

On the latter point, there is little disagreement: Very few things in this world are as unproductive as government bureaucracies.

However, said Seidman in an inter-

view yesterday, it's "difficult to measure" government productivity: "Obviously, you can measure the productivity of the sanitation department, but you have difficulties with fisheries and even more difficulties with health and services departments and psychiatrists."

Generally, "the government does not have the self-discipline of the bottom line," said Seidman, dean of the College of Business at Arizona State University and former assistant to the President for economic affairs in the Ford administration.

"On balance" government is less productive than the private sector, Seidman said, but there are very productive government operations and pathetically unproductive private sector operations, "as we can see in the bankruptcy courts."

Clearly, the alarming slowdown in

U.S. productivity growth during the last couple of decades can be blamed greatly on bad government, Seidman agreed. Our tax system punishes productivity by diminishing savings, for example, he noted.

And there are other root causes that could be addressed, at least in part, by intelligent legislation: Excessive environmental and regulatory requirements that drain corporate funds from productivity-enhancing investment; huge federal deficits; massive government spending for income redistribution; the decline in education.

Also, the inflation-recession cycle which handicaps long-term planning; the phenomenon of "the litigious society," wherein unnecessary time and money are drained away in court; a tax system that promotes consumption at the expense of savings, and the like.

But many of the problems must be solved by the private sector: The antagonism between labor and management; the decline of the work ethic, although Seidman doubts that's as severe a problem as others believe; management's obsession with short-term results at the expense of long-term planning; reduced spending for research and development; the spiraling cost of computer software and business schools' overemphasis on the financial, rather than operating side of enterprise.

The conference will meet again in early August at Pittsburgh's Carnegie-Mellon University to discuss private sector initiatives. The White House conference will be held Sept. 22 and 23.



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F. WILLIAM SEIDMAN